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ABSTRACT

This digest paper presents a model for the education of gifted children and youth based on the concept of talent development and suggests specific ways to identify and develop talent. New conceptions of intelligence and talent developed by Sternberg, Gardner, and Gagne are noted. Feldhusen's and Wood's model of talent recognition and development is explained, noting that both talent identification and development involve a long range process in which parents, school personnel, and the students themselves work together. Teachers and other school personnel are urged to be alert to signs of talent, structure learning activities to students' demonstrated talent potential, use praise to recognize and reinforce signs of talent, help students set learning goals in their talent areas, locate resources in the school and community that can help develop students' talents, and enlist parents in identifying and nurturing their children's talents. (Contains 10 references.) (DB)

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Talent Development in Gifted Education

John F. Feldhusen

The last decades of the twentieth century saw the growth of a large body of research and development around the concept of intelligence. New concepts have facilitated new approaches to identifying and developing giftedness in young people. This digest presents a model for the education of gifted children and youth based on the concept of talent development. Specific ways to identify and develop talent are also discussed.

New Conceptions of Intelligence and Talent

A longstanding tradition in the field of gifted education assumes it is possible and desirable to identify children as "gifted" based on high IQ scores and/or high achievement test scores. Gifted programming developed from a notion of global and fixed intelligence and often resulted in exclusive one-size-fits-all programs of study. Such an approach disregarded the individual strengths and potential of some gifted students.

In contrast, the work of Sternberg (1991) and Gardner (1983) led to a diagnostic approach to ability, where specific talents or aptitudes became the focus for identification and services. Sternberg's theory proposed a number of components of intelligence in three broad categories: metacomponents (planning, monitoring, and evaluation), performance components (skills and abilities), and knowledge-acquisition components (processing and encoding). Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (originally linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal) also elaborated on the view of human abilities as multidimensional.

Gagne's research (1985, 1993) and model for talent development explicitly set the stage for a focus on talents. He proposed an underlying set of aptitudes or gifts that are intellectual, creative, socio-affective, perceptual-motor, and other unspecified abilities. With these basic abilities the child interacts with catalysts such as teachers or parents and participates in learning, training, and practice experiences. With encouragement and support, a child's talents emerge from these experiences.

A Model for Talent Recognition and Development in Schools

Programs, curricula, and services for gifted and talented youth can best meet their needs, promote their achievements in life, and contribute to the enhancement of our society when schools identify students' specific talent strengths and focus educational services on these talents. Schools are in a unique position to identify and develop the talents of students in four major domains: academic, artistic, vocational-technical, and personal-social. The academic domain includes science, math, English, social studies, and languages. Dance, music, drama, photography, and graphic arts comprise the artistic domain. The vocational-technical areas are home economics, trade-industrial, business-office, agriculture, and computers-technology. Finally, in the interpersonal realm, leadership, care-giving, and human services are potential areas in which identification and nurturance of specific talents can be carried out.

Several rating scales and checklists are useful in identifying talents in all four of the domains. These include the ten *Scales for Rating the Behavioral Characteristics of Superior Students* by Renzulli et al. (1997), the *Purdue Academic Rating Scales* and *Purdue Vocational Rating Scales* (Feldhusen, Hoover, & Sayler, 1997). A wide variety of aptitude and achievement tests can be used to identify academic and some of the vocational-technical talents. Auditions are the preferred mode of evaluating talent in the performing arts and portfolios in the graphic arts. Portfolios are also useful in the identification of talents in academic areas when they contain the results of a child's projects, problem-solving activities, and creative productions.

However, the process of recognizing and developing talents should not be seen as a one-shot, one-time determination with tests and rating scales labeling students as "talented" or "untalented." Rather, it is a long-range process in which parents, school personnel, and the students themselves recognize, understand, and work together to facilitate the development of the students' unique talents.

As a way of involving students, parents, teachers, and counselors in the recognition and development of student talent, Feldhusen and Wood (1997) presented a system for "growth planning" in which students, grades 3-12, plan in late spring their school programs for the coming year. They inventory and review their own achievements, assess their own interests and learning styles, and write personal goals (academic, career, and social). They then select courses, extracurricular activities, and out-of-school experiences that are commensurate with their prior achievements, reflect the goals they have set for themselves, and are suitably challenging.

Feldhusen and Wood used the system with several hundred gifted and talented students and found it to be an effective method for involving children and youth in the talent development process. Talented students often could engage in learning activities with little or minimum teacher involvement. Feldhusen reported that the students' capacity for self-direction in individual and small group work was very high if their teachers provided good instructional material and initial directions. The students grew rapidly in their capacity to carry out self-directed and individualized learning.

Strategies for Recognizing and Developing Talent

All students at all ages have relative talent strengths, and schools should help them identify and understand their own special abilities. Those whose talents are at levels exceptionally higher than their peers should have access to instructional resources and activities that are commensurate with their talents (Feldhusen, 1998). They need a great deal of help and emotional support from parents, extensive edu-

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cational input and resources from the school, a supportive peer environment, and mentors who can demonstrate and model advanced levels of expertise and creativity in their areas of talent potential (Pleiss & Feldhusen, 1995).

Teachers and other school personnel can employ the following strategies to help implement this model (Feldhusen, 1996).

- Be alert to signs of talent in the four talent areas. Point out strengths to the student and parents, and test to verify possible emerging talent.
- Structure learning activities that will give students the opportunity to demonstrate their talent potential.
- Use praise to recognize and reinforce signs of talent.
- Help students who have talent in particular areas set learning goals in that area.
- Locate resources in the school and community that can help foster the student's talents.
- Enlist parents in identifying and nurturing their children's talents by providing resources and experiences, and encouraging goal-setting behavior.

The ultimate goal of talent recognition and development is to help students understand their own talent strengths and potentials, to know how to pursue and engage in the best talent development activities, and to commit themselves to the development of their talents.

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